

New Aircraft:

1976: The Navy accepts the first turboprop T-34C to replace the piston-engined T-34B and T-28C. The AH-1T Sea Cobra joins the Marine Corps after testing by Bell.

1977: The first production P-3C Update II arrives at Patuxent River for evaluation.

1978: The AV-8B Harrier II and the FA-18 Hornet make their first flights at St. Louis.

1983: The first fleet CH-53E is delivered to HM-12.

1985: The Navy buys the F-16N to provide late-generation adversary services for fleet squadrons. The AV-8B enters service with VMA-331.

Development had begun on the FA-18 Hornet. The FA-18 soon became the next-generation Navy and Marine Corps tactical-attack aircraft, eventually replacing the A-4 and A-6.

The ship-based ASW community awaited the Sikorsky SH-60 Seahawk, the replacement for the H-2 and H-3. The three-engine CH-53E was the free world's most powerful heavy-lift helicopter, while the Navy and Marine Corps looked for a replacement for the aging CH-46 fleet.

A new class of nuclear carriers, headed by the USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68), joined operations. Two others, the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69) and USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70), began

1976-1985

Important Dates:

January 28, 1976: Navy awards a contract for development of the FA-18 to McDonnell Douglas.

May 26, 1976: Beech Aircraft receives a contract for a new multi-engine trainer, the T-44A, a version of the civilian King Air 90.

July 13, 1977: An F-4J lands at the FAA test facility at Atlantic City, NJ, using the microwave-landing system for the first time.

February 27, 1978: CH-53E production is awarded to Sikorsky Aircraft.

June 20, 1979: Flying a C-1A, Lt. Donna L. Spruill becomes the first female naval aviator to carrier-qualify in a fixed-wing aircraft.

October 14, 1979: The first A-6E TRAM enters fleet operation.

April 24, 1980: RH-53Ds from USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68) participate in an abortive attempt to rescue the hostages in Iran. A collision between a helicopter and a USAF C-130 at the landing site results in eight fatalities and cancellation of the mission. The hostages would remain in captivity until the following January.

December 8, 1980: USS *Eisenhower* (CVN-69) is relieved by USS *Independence* (CV-62). "Ike's" deployment had lasted a record 251 days; she had been underway for 152 continuous days.

January 31, 1981: The last NAP still on active duty, Master Chief Robert K. Jones, retires after 38 years of service.

April 12, 1981: The space shuttle *Columbia* launches with an all-Navy crew. It is the beginning of America's reusable space-plane program.

August 19, 1981: Two VF-41 Tomcats shoot down two Libyan Su-22s over international waters. The two Sukhoi are the F-14's first kills.

July 13, 1982: LCdr. Barbara Allen Rainey, the first female naval aviator, and an instructor with VT-3, is killed during a training mishap.

February 21, 1985: The USS *Constellation* (CV-64) battle group takes the FA-18 and SH-60B on their first deployments.

By 1976, we were out of Vietnam, women had begun flight training in earnest. The F-14 Tomcat and S-3 Viking were joining the fleet. Carriers were designated CVs, replacing the CVA to indicate the overall mission.

construction. Nuclear-powered carriers allowed the Navy to reduce the number of carriers and increase at-sea periods.

Beginning in November 1979, carrier task forces often spent six months on station in the Indian Ocean or in the narrow confines of the Gulf as the Iranian hostage crisis continued without diplomatic resolution until January 1981.

In late 1983, aboard USS *Independence* (CV-62), the air wing supported the U.S.-led invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada to liberate American citizens held hostage. Aircraft from USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) flew the first alpha strike since Vietnam in response to the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon.

Naval Aviation Mishaps

